

# EMBASSY SUITES SARASOTA

**SUBTLE LUXURY**

WAYS TO ROCK A STAYCATION  
RIGHT IN YOUR OWN DOWNTOWN  
RAY COLLINS

Okay, I watched it being built from scratch...my curiosity got the best of me...so we decided it was time to check out the new Embassy Suites Hotel by Hilton in downtown Sarasota. 18-stories, pool, work-out room and restaurant/bar on the 8th floor.

The restaurant is named after the builder Jim Bridges, and “Bridges Restaurant” is not to be missed: Not only does it have a wonderful view of the bay, the downtown skyline and the traffic (and construction) below—but the bar also has the feel of a fun sports bar. We arrived before check-in on a Saturday—so the friendly front-desk clerk suggested we go have lunch at “Bridges” and she’d bring our bags to our room and our key to the restaurant before we finished. And she kept her word! (I can’t forget her name, “Tuesday.” She was so efficient; I’d hire her on a Monday!)

Erin had a Cobb salad and I had a salmon salad. After lunch, we went up a few more floors to our room—and talk about a sweet suite! Living room, kitchen area, big two-sink bathroom and perfect bedroom overlooking the bay. From the 12th floor, we looked out at the Ritz Carlton and down the street from the sailor and nurse statue.

Seeing the Ritz and the other hotels outside my window caused me to do a very informal survey: Just for fun I clicked on well-known travel site “Orbitz” and punched up hotels in Sarasota. One room, two adults. Ritz Carlton: \$529. Art Ovation: \$233. Hyatt: \$189. Aloft: \$175. Westin: \$159. Embassy Suites: \$156.



And Embassy Suites may be the only one to offer free Happy Hour AND free hot buffet breakfast! We unpacked, put on swimsuits and went back down the elevator to the hotel's epicenter, the 8th floor. The hotel's pool would be a favorite of dermatologists since it is under a roof. It still has a nice view of the skyline and the bayfront. We met some interesting people by the pool—including a pro golfer and his girlfriend/caddie playing in from Orlando to play in a tournament, and a couple from Palm Beach here for a nonprofit gala. The free Happy Hour in "Bridges" was underway so I offered to buy drinks for our new friends.

Later, we showered and changed for dinner. One of my favorite parts of our "weekend getaways" is going to dinner without car keys, sunglasses or a wallet—and just charging the meal back to the room. Just ride the elevator to the restaurant! Decadent. "Bridges" has a locally famous chef with an extensive resume. Chef Sol Shenker advertised two specials—and uncharacteristically, Erin and I gravitated toward different choices: Erin had the Southwest Florida Shrimp & Grouper. Fresh gulf grouper grilled with lightly seasoned with local gulf jumbo shrimp and mussels topped with lobster bisque served with chef pilaf and fresh veggie. (\$32.)

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Ray Collins and Erin Hurter at Bridges at The  
Embassy Suites Sarasota